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TO : The Secretary
THROUGH: S/S
FROM : INR - Thomas Hughes *Hughes, T. H.*
SUBJECT: Soviet Domestic Propaganda on the Cuban Crisis, October 23-31, 1962

This paper describes and analyzes the picture of the Cuban crisis which the Soviet Government sought to present to its own people during the period October 23 to October 31.

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ABSTRACT

From the first, Soviet domestic propaganda presented the crisis as a US-Cuban, rather than as a US-Soviet, confrontation. Thus, the Soviet people, in spite of frequent but undeveloped hints of the possibility of nuclear war, were shielded from a realization of the full gravity of the crisis. Moreover, presentation of the crisis as a US-Cuban dispute allowed the Soviet Government to avoid committing its prestige to a public test of nerves with the US. When the decision to remove the missiles from Cuba was announced, this could be presented as a peaceful gesture in return for the US assurance not to invade Cuba. Since, according to Soviet propaganda, the object from the first had been to ward off a US invasion and the nuclear war which it was said would ensue, this denouement was a victory for the Soviet government, for all peace-loving peoples -- whose consistent support of the varying position of the Soviet Government was alleged throughout the crisis -- and (not least of all) for Khrushchev personally.

Within the basic framework of propaganda treatment, however, reactions to the swift-moving events of October 22-23 were by no means always sure and consistent. Domestic propagandists got off to a slow start after the President's October 22 speech; they clearly did not know what to make of Khrushchev's summit suggestion to Bertrand Russell; they were uncertain in their response to the Turkish-for-Cuban bases letter; the October 23 "dismantling" letter appears to have caught them completely by surprise; and they were extremely cautious at first toward Castro's five demands. Certain themes were obviously too hot to handle -- such as the real nature of the objectionable weapons in Cuba or the behavior of

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Soviet ships in the quarantine zone. Propagandists tended instead to concentrate as much as possible on the safe and easy subjects of anti-US protest meetings and messages of gratitude for or solidarity with the Soviet Government.

October 23

Soviet domestic propaganda reaction to the President's October 22 speech was delayed. It was not until some 14 hours after the speech, and just before issuance of the official Soviet statement in reply to the speech, that Radio Moscow carried a short 250-word report on the speech to domestic audiences. The report gave excerpts from the speech but omitted any of the President's statements concerning Soviet rockets. Radio Moscow's only comment on the speech was "that it abounded in crude anti-Soviet attacks."

The Soviet Government statement which immediately followed also avoided mention of specific Soviet countermeasures, stating only that the USSR rejected claims that the US had the right to demand that states report to it on what they carry in their ships. Already this statement struck what was to be the dominant propaganda note of the week: that this was a US-Cuban confrontation, and that the crisis was due to US efforts to dictate to the Cuban people. Domestic propaganda in the hours following the statement appeared to be aimed at allaying the possible fears of the public by statements concerning the increased preparedness of the armed forces.¹⁴ Attempts were also made to bolster the morale and solidarity of the people by broadcasts and newspaper reports concerning the "wave" of protest meetings against the US quarantine which was "rolling over the USSR." Reports on these "workers' protest meetings" were widely circulated by the Soviet regional radio services. An impression of "socialist solidarity" with the USSR during the emergency was also attempted through a report on Radio Moscow of the meeting of the ambassadors of the "socialist countries" with Kuznetsov.

October 24

Domestic propaganda on October 24 was more massive and apparently better organized than on the previous day, with 76 percent of all radio commentary

1. It should be noted, however, that the lack of propaganda preparation for the crisis, the frequency of large-scale propaganda campaigns in the past, and the general propaganda trend in the present crisis to treat this as a US-Cuban confrontation undoubtedly prevented the Soviet public from realizing the full seriousness of the situation.

time devoted to Cuba, a record unmatched in any previous crisis. The Soviet newspapers, Pravda, Izvestiya and Red Star in lead editorials repeated and elaborated some of the themes touched on during the previous day, such as the military preparedness of the Soviet Union, but still failed to mention any specific Soviet response to US accusations regarding missile sites or the US quarantine.

While there was no direct denial of the President's charges on construction of missile bases in Cuba, commentators attempted to cast doubt on the nature of the US evidence and maintained the general position that all Soviet weapons are in any case "defensive." An attempt was also made at picturing US leaders as adventurers who were irresponsibly courting thermonuclear war by their actions.

Much of the Moscow propaganda, however, both domestic and foreign, tried to portray the crisis as a case of US aggression against a progressive and peace-loving Cuba rather than as a US response to a Soviet move. The Pravda editorial for October 24 tried to establish such a picture and in addition claimed that the quarantine was against international law and the principles of the UN. World reaction against the US quarantine was also highlighted. In order to counter somewhat the tone of alarm in many of the above propaganda items, the Soviet people were informed through press and radio of the attendance of Soviet leaders at a performance of "Boris Godunov" in which an American singer sang the lead role "with great success."

October 25

The intensity of Soviet propaganda to domestic audiences continued at the high level of October 24 with stress on the peaceful intent of the Soviet Union as shown in the highly publicized exchange of messages between Khrushchev and Bertrand Russell. (There was, however, no comment on Khrushchev's remark about the usefulness of a "meeting at the highest level.") The publicity given in domestic media to the U Thant request to refrain from action that would court the danger of war also appeared to be for the purpose of allaying public fears, as was the widespread reporting of Westinghouse International president Knox's meeting with Khrushchev. At the same time that efforts toward peaceful resolution of the crisis were being publicized, the Soviet people heard much of the steadfast resolve and tranquility shown by key groups throughout the country and the determination of factory workers to increase their output because of the emergency. The efforts of Soviet propagandists at this point in the crisis appeared to be directed toward keeping the emotions of the public under control so that they would not give way to panic or war hysteria but would still be prepared for any emergency.

The publication in Red Star of a speech delivered by Marshal Malinovsky a week earlier, which repeated the standard Soviet claims of military superiority over the West, was apparently intended to reassure the domestic public of the deterrent effect of Soviet military might.

The omission up to October 25 of any references in domestic media to the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba and the very limited references after that date seemed to reflect the anxiousness of the Soviet Government not to appear before the Soviet people as the aggressor in the Cuban situation.

October 26

Soviet domestic propaganda continued to present the crisis as a US-Cuban confrontation, and articles throughout the press repeatedly asserted that the blockade was merely the prelude to a US invasion of Cuba. There was continued wide coverage of protest meetings both at home and abroad with increasing emphasis on the alleged worldwide support for the "reasonable" and "peace-loving" stand of the Soviet Union, as exemplified in the Khrushchev messages to Bertrand Russell and U Thant. Statements by other bloc governments, including the CFR, were said to support fully the "correct position of the Soviet Government against the military provocations of US imperialism," thus giving a picture of complete bloc solidarity.

The lead editorial in Pravda, under the title "Reason Must Triumph," called upon the US Government to weigh "all the consequences" of its policy. Just what these consequences might entail by way of concrete response on the part of the Soviet Union was glossed over in silence, presumably in order not to excite the Soviet populace unduly with the prospect of a nuclear war or to commit the Soviet government publicly to any specific course of action from which it might subsequently be forced to retreat. Thus, in spite of all the generalized expressions of support for Cuba, no concrete pledges were made to defend Cuba from the allegedly imminent invasion by Soviet action. Even Red Star, which throughout the crisis presented the most militant commentary, spoke only of the high state of readiness of the Soviet armed forces, especially the strategic rocket forces. The over-all impression created by these propaganda themes was a picture of the Soviet Government (and to a large degree, Khrushchev personally), backed by world opinion and a highly efficient military deterrent force, doing everything reasonably possible to preserve world peace.

October 27

Evidently, the course of events during the period October 27-28 was too swift for the Soviet propagandists, and their treatment of the crisis during this time was marked by considerable hesitancy and inconsistency. Thus, domestic propaganda media, prior to release of Khrushchev's message offering to trade Cuban for Turkish bases, stepped up efforts to cast doubt on the US evidence of missile-base construction in Cuba. After release of the message, however, such efforts largely ceased, as Khrushchev's letter was -- by implication -- a clear admission of the truth of the US charges.

Moreover, the Khrushchev letter of October 27 was not preceded or followed by any very vigorous propaganda campaign in support of the Turkish-for-Cuban bases proposal. There had been a few scattered hints in the Soviet domestic press and radio prior to October 27 of such a "solution" to the crisis, but except for one or two instances, Turkey had not been specially mentioned in this connection. Such hints as appeared were probably nothing more than an echo of the September 11 TASS statement on Cuba, which had asserted that there was an inconsistency between the US attitude on Soviet bases in Cuba and the US policy of maintaining overseas bases.

For the first time, the question of a US-Soviet confrontation at the quarantine line was raised with a report of the search of the Lebanese ship Marcula. However, there was no mention of the interception of a Soviet tanker, which was simply reported to have arrived in Cuba.

October 28

In the 24-hour interval between the release of Khrushchev's October 27 message and his letter of October 28 promising to dismantle the Cuban bases in return for a US guarantee not to invade Cuba, Soviet propagandists appeared to be marking time. Press coverage of Cuba was actually reduced somewhat, for the third day in a row. In contrast to usual practice, there was no massive editorial follow-up to the Turkish-for-Cuban bases letter. Articles in Pravda and Izvestiya attacked the "ominous cobweb" of US foreign military bases, but there was no concentration on NATO bases in Turkey in particular. Nor was there any mention of the White House statement rejecting Khrushchev's proposal. A particularly glaring example of confusion in the Soviet propaganda apparatus was provided by one unlucky commentator's characterization of the Cuba-Turkey swap proposal as "hucksterish" some 12 hours after Khrushchev had proposed it.

Domestic propaganda played down the theme of the risk of global warfare. A Red Star article by the Soviet commander in East Germany, General Yakubovsky, said that Soviet troops were ready to "do their duty" in the light of the Cuban crisis, but the article was relatively non-committal in tone and made no effort to link Cuba and Berlin. However, the possibility of a US-Soviet clash was brought home to the Soviet public in more concrete form than at any time previously during the crisis with the publication of the U Thant-Khrushchev exchanges on diversion of Soviet ships to Cuba in order to avoid incidents.

The release of Khrushchev's new message on dismantling of the bases in mid-afternoon of October 28 evidently caught the Soviet propagandists once more unprepared, for there was little or no comment on the content of the message itself. There was, however, a flood of reports on expressions of approval from at home and abroad.

October 29

Monday's Pravda featured the latest Khrushchev message to President Kennedy in place of the usual front-page editorial. Also printed, without comment, were the President's replies to the October 28 letter, as well as to the October 26 letter (which had not previously been mentioned by Soviet media). The tone of the day's propaganda was set by the banner headline in Pravda, "Preserve Peace and Security of the Peoples." (This contrasted with the October 24 headline, "Bridle the Reckless American Aggressors.") People all over the world were said to have heaved "a sigh of relief" and the Soviet people were reported to be expressing unanimous approval for the "wise policy" of the Soviet Government, which had been able "in the most complicated circumstances to find a way to avert the threat of a thermonuclear war."

The Soviet propagandists were faced with the obvious problem of warding off any interpretation of Khrushchev's move as a defeat for Soviet policy. Thus, continuing stress was laid on the Soviet people's solidarity with Cuba. Articles in Pravda and (next day) in Red Star quoted Soviet citizens as saying, "Let no one take our love of peace for weakness." Finally, and most important, there were the beginnings of a campaign to present the Soviet move as a great victory for world peace in that US aggression against Cuba had been foiled, and an atmosphere created in which many questions (unspecified) might be solved by peaceful means.

However, domestic propagand , while reducing its attacks on US "aggressiveness" toward Cuba, was evidently at pains also to prevent the Soviet public from gaining the impression that the crisis was all over and that vigilance could be relaxed. A Moscow broadcast warned that "the enemies of peace will continue to try to kindle the fire of a world war and will stage provocations to increase international tension." Nevertheless, the veiled threats of Soviet retaliation against any aggression tended to disappear.

October 30

The volume of Soviet press coverage of Cuba slackened considerably. The main propaganda theme remained the reported worldwide gratitude and relief at the Soviet Government decision to remove from Cuba the weapons "which President Kennedy calls offensive" and thus avert nuclear war. Popular and press satisfaction in the US was also reported.

An article in Pravda by "Observers" Zhukov and Mayevsky, 'ateliers' New York, summed up and interpreted in authoritative fashion the events of the preceding week for the Soviet public. The article synthesized most of the leading propaganda themes of the week: that the US had planned to invade Cuba and install a pro-American puppet regime as the first move in

"a general offensive against communism;" that the complaint against Soviet weapons in Cuba -- whose purpose in any case was purely defensive -- were merely a pretext for the planned invasion; that the calm, reasonable, and peace-loving policy of the Soviet Government, backed by world opinion, foiled the aggressive plans of the Pentagon and preserved the world from a nuclear catastrophe; but that certain circles in the US were still hatching new aggressive designs against Cuba, and "the danger of new complications cannot be ruled out."

Thus Soviet propaganda was by now able to build up a tolerably plausible and consistent picture for home consumption of a victory for the Soviet Union (and for Khrushchev, who throughout the crisis was given star billing) in the interests of world peace. Such potentially awkward points as the exact identity of the weapons "termed offensive by President Kennedy," Latin American support for the US, the precise nature of the Soviet commitment to defend Cuba, the inconsistencies among the published messages of Khrushchev, or Sino-Albanian criticism of the dismantling move were not allowed to disturb this edifying picture.

A new element in the day's propaganda was the rather scattered approving commentary on Castro's five demands, which, though published the day before in Pravda, had been otherwise ignored. However, comment on the Castro demands was careful not to imply any commitment on the part of the Soviet Government as to their implementation.

October 31

Soviet propaganda was dominated by the same themes as on the preceding day, but total volume of coverage on the crisis was further reduced as articles in honor of the first anniversary of the 22nd CPSU Congress' acceptance of the new party program and the impending 45th anniversary of the October revolution dominated the press. The Soviet people were, however, given perhaps the clearest hint to date of the real seriousness of the crisis in the opening words of the lead editorial in Izvestiya, which said, "The past few days have been a most serious test for the cause of general peace.... Mankind has come face to face with the threat of the outbreak of nuclear war." Although the article emphasized that peace had been saved by the wise action of the Soviet Government and that events had demonstrated "the efficacy of the method of peaceful settlement of conflicts by way of talks," it warned once again that "new provocations" might be on the way and also pointed out that talks on practical questions were only beginning. Once more, the solidarity of the Soviet Union with Cuba was emphasized.